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/nuc book/DRAFT 6-7

One day when I was thirty years old I saw how the world would end. Not the earth, not all humans or life, but the destruction of most cities and people in the Northern Hemisphere. And possibly, it turned out later, in the South as well, in which case nearly all human life and most species more complex than bacteria would be destroyed.

What I saw was a single sheet of paper with some numbers and lines on it. It was marked Top Secret—Sensitive, For the President's Eyes Only. A cover sheet identified it as the answer to President Kennedy of a question he had addressed to the Joint Chiefs of Staff a week earlier. The "Eyes Only" designation meant that, in principle, it was to be seen and read only by the president himself, though in practice this usually meant that it would be seen by one or more secretaries and assistants as well: a handful of people, instead of the dozens or more who would normally see copies of a "Top Secret—Sensitive" document.

It's the only time I can remember seeing a document with this marking. But because I had drafted the question myself, and happened to be in the White House office of Bob Komer, the Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security just after it arrived, Komer showed me the JCS' answer.

The question was: "If your plans for general [nuclear] war are carried out as planned, how many people will die in the Soviet Union and China?"

The answer was in the form of a graph. The vertical axis was labeled number of people killed, in millions. Time, in months, was measured along the horizontal axis, up to six months. The graph was a straight line, starting on the vertical axis at time zero—the immediate deaths expected within hours of our attack—and slanting upwards to a maximum at six months, an arbitrary cut-off for the deaths that would accumulate over time from initial injuries and from radiation from fall-out.

The lowest number, at the left of the graph, was 275 million deaths. The number at the right-hand side, at six months, was 325 million.

With Komer's approval, I drafted another question to be sent to the Chiefs in the president's name, asking for a break-down of total, global deaths from our own attacks, including not only the whole Sino-Soviet bloc but all other countries that would be affected by fall-out. Again, their answer was prompt, this time in the form of a table, with explanatory foot-notes.

In sum, another hundred million deaths, roughly, were predicted in East Europe. There might be a hundred million deaths from fall-out in West Europe, depending on which way the wind blew. Another hundred million, at least, from fall-out in countries adjacent to the Soviet Bloc and China, most of them neutral: Finland, Austria, Afghanistan, India,

Fig. 1

Japan and others. Finland, for example, would be virtually wiped out by fall-out from our ground-burst explosions on the submarine pens at Leningrad.

The total death-toll as calculated by the Joint Chiefs, from a US first strike aimed primarily at the Soviet Union, would be roughly six hundred million dead. A hundred Holocausts.

